Fort Peck Community College:
TCU Ongoing Challenges During COVID-19 Pandemic

117th Congress – February 2021

Through the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act and Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act (CRRSAA), **Fort Peck Community College** (Poplar, MT) received urgently needed funding to move classes online to the extent possible and begin to address tremendous digital divide challenges. We were also able to provide emergency grants, equipment, and tuition assistance to our students to help them stay enrolled in classes. As we continue to support students during this difficult time and plan for onsite classes, our needs are growing. To address current pandemic-related challenges and plan for an uncertain future, TCUs need your ongoing support.

CARES and CRRSAA Funds at Fort Peck Community College
- Student aid
- Safety/Sanitation
- IT upgrades
- Classroom changes/physically distant
- Professional development for distance learning
- Ongoing student support such Internet, laptops, meal plans.

COVID-19 impacted FPCC and the traditional in-person instruction at FPCC. Early on in the pandemic, Fort Peck Community College was granted temporary approval to distance delivery education. This approval was only granted until December 31, 2020. After a lot of discussions related to the current trends and COVID cases and research of online platforms at other Tribal Colleges, FPCC determined it was in the best interest to continue with online delivery of programs for the safety of students , staff, faculty, and the community.

In June 2020, FPCC purchased Canvas. Canvas is a Learner Management System (LMS) used in higher education to deliver academic programs online. Faculty and staff participated in CANVAS training for course delivery and classes.

In November, FPCC applied to make programs available via distance delivery. Approval for distance delivery programs was a two-step process. The first step of institutional authorization determines if FPCC has the resources and capacity to offer effective instruction via distance education. On November 16, 2020, Fort Peck Community College (FPCC) was authorized for distance education. Funding is also needed to make appropriate campus-wide class adjustments for new and/or renovations to accommodate physical distancing in the COVID-19 environment.

Ongoing Challenges at Fort Peck Community College

Many of our students need mental and emotional support to address the isolation and despair that resulted from the disruptions of the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, FPCC launched a "Buffalo Chasers" weekly podcast to address the spiritual and wholistic aspects of student wellness. FPCC also hosts a weekly Virtual Student Talking Circle to provide students another outlet to connect with peers and staff members. Mental health, tuition waivers, and IT support will continue to be critical components of maximizing student persistence and retention.

FPCC provided all students with free tuition and fees for the spring '21 Semester. Other student supports included free meal plans, free laptop, and free internet.
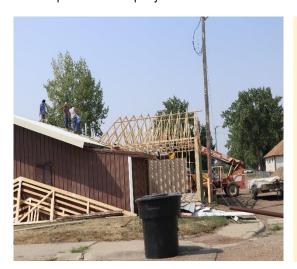
Fort Peck Community College: Broadband and IT Challenges
Due to the limited capacity of FPCC, these are the top IT related challenges:
- Annual broadband service costs - $25,000
- Annual cloud-based service costs - $24,000
- Annual LMS costs - $20,000
- Annual integrated software maintenance - $60,000
- Periodic Hardware Upgrades (36 month scheduled upgrade) – up to $250,000
- Limited applicant pool for qualified IT professionals; inability to provide competitive pay scales for IT employees; thus, FPCC is dependent on 3rd party vendors.

Fort Peck Community College: Facilities Needs -- Construction, Maintenance, Rehabilitation
There are plenty of ongoing construction challenges on the campus of Fort Peck Community College, with campuses in both Poplar, MT and Wolf Point, MT.

Classrooms are inadequate for social distancing, and there is need for additional classroom space. FPCC needs additional faculty offices, as many of the current offices are too small or have inadequate shared spaces. FPCC has had a health and community facility on its master plan for years, which would include a gymnasium, weight room, kitchen space, office spaces, and community meeting space for public use.

The college needs new facilities for the Wellness Centers, with one currently operating in both Poplar and Wolf Point. These health wellness centers are located in buildings that are old and in desperate need of renovations and rehabilitation, besides being very space constricted. These wellness centers are very popular in their respective communities, and they both get usage anywhere from 5:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. throughout the day. There is also a need for infrastructure across campus, including new sidewalks, additional parking lots and spaces, additional lighting on and around campus buildings, and several streets across campus are in desperate need of new paving. Other facility needs that FPCC has include additional faculty housing, additional dorm space, a dedicated Maintenance & Janitorial building, and various equipment needed for building, renovating and rehabilitating facilities and infrastructure across campus.